
A MOUT DOCTRINAL CONCEPT
MG Robert H. Scales, Jr., USA

I appreciate the opportunity to be here. You're going to see something really extraordinary this afternoon: a serving two-star general in the American Army attempt to say something cogent without the use of PowerPoint.

I've been asked to come and talk about an article I wrote last October on urban warfare. In fact, I've just published a new article in *Strategic Review* in February [1999]. I commend it to you. Its called "Adaptive Enemies." It was written after a trip to the Far East during which I visited a very large Asian country. I had some incredible discussions about the American way of war and foreign perceptions regarding the American way of war with my counterparts there. Let me encapsulate them for you before I get to urban warfare.

Actually, the two articles are related. The "Adaptive Enemies" article says, essentially, that the United States has been displaying a fire-power-centered style of war for the last 50 or 60 years. The premise of this thesis is that militaries are essentially complex adaptive organizations that tend, when faced with a threat to one style of war, to adapt themselves to another style. Most of the article is a recounting of the American experience beginning with the Pacific campaign in World War II where we faced essentially a thinking enemy with a will to win and time on his hands to adapt. For example, let me start with the terrible tragedy of Saipan (from the Japanese perspective), followed by General Ushijima Mitsur's ability to reconstitute the Japanese 32nd Army in Okinawa. Ninety days of combat, 90,000 casualties, 9,000 dead Americans, and a Japanese defense that achieved its objective. We met an enemy who learned how to adapt.

In Korea, after the horrible experience of Lin Piao and the 1951 disaster, just north of Wonju, the Chinese adapted and came up with a system that allowed them to disperse and achieve their operational, and later their strategic, objectives. The Tet Offensive, a terrible experience for the North Vietnamese, changed their operational method. We suffered more casualties after Tet as the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] learned how to use a concept they borrowed from the Chinese: “maneuver under firepower.” Other examples pervade. We could also talk about Afghanistan or the Israelis in Lebanon in 1982.

What I argue in the *Strategic Review* article is very simple: If an enemy is faced with an opponent who follows a predictable attrition style of war, that opponent essentially has an unbalanced military system. The enemy's object is to gain his operational objectives very quickly and then go to ground. He would disperse, then change his maneuver method from one of being objective-oriented to being area-oriented. This is an adaptation of the Maoist concept of area control. His object is to create a non-nodal entity, to distribute his area defense and build a military system that is able to prevail under a fire-power-intensive umbrella. His object is not to win but to avoid losing. He achieves this by using his own powers of time, the will to win, mass, and the inherent power of the defensive to hang on long enough to achieve his operational and perhaps his strategic objectives.

Last October, I also published an article about warfare in urban environments. I've spent thirty-some years reading and writing military history and looking at historical examples. Be careful when you use case studies, please. Remember the slide someone showed a little earlier that listed 15 or 20 examples of urban combat, and then they picked out a chosen few? Please be careful with that. If you develop operational doctrine from a selective use of history—this idea of niche history—you are walking right down the road to disaster. So please be careful. There's nothing wrong with a case study. But history is a holistic intellectual exercise. It's not a sort of library where you can go out and take one example from column A and two from column B to prove your point.

A couple other thoughts for you to consider. In our last Army After Next [AAN] War Game at the Army War College, we postulated an

enemy whose objective was to quickly capture cities in the violated country in order to avoid American dominance in fire power. This game postulated war in the year 2025. The United States had a balanced military instrument, capable of achieving precision maneuver as well as precision fire, an instrument that was able to collapse an enemy very quickly, to strike, paralyze, exploit the paralytic effect of precision fires, control large areas, get to the battlefield before the enemy was able to set himself, collapse the opponent's will to win, and win quickly at minimum cost of life.

Well, unfortunately, that's not what happened, because the gentleman who played the National Command Authority waited, and waited, and waited. Finally, after the enemy had achieved his operational objectives, the AAN battle force and the AEF [Aerospace Expeditionary Force] companion force were dispatched late to the area of operations. Immediately the National Command Authority told his subordinates to get on with it, to get into the cities, and root the aggressor out. I found that to be very disturbing because it follows a pattern that I started to hear as a mantra during the last two or three years, as everybody sort of picked up on this idea about urban warfare. There's a tendency, again, if we don't look at history holistically, to go immediately into the tactical, to focus on the toys without thinking through exactly what it is you're talking about. Let me give you some facts, and then we can take our discussion from there.

It's the old "if, then" paradox. If the world is urbanized, if 50 percent of the world will be living in cities by the year 2025, then wars will likely occur in urban areas. That seems to be the reigning logic. That assumption is not historically grounded. In fact, if we look at the last 500 years of Western warfare, the number of urban warfare incidents has decreased, not increased. There has been far less urban warfare in the last 100 years than in the last 1,000 years. And there's a reason for it: Cities are strategic centers of gravity. They're valuable to someone. As Clausewitz says, in order for armies to join in battle, both sides have to agree to fight. Most incidents of modern urban warfare were mistakes, fought for all the wrong reasons: ideology, bad military doctrine, a political fixation, or an attempt to draw a superior power into city streets in order to bleed him. In other words, to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It doesn't matter what example we use, whether it's Stalingrad, Mogadishu, or Chechnya. When cities become political symbols or become lures

that we can't avoid for some reason, they become battlegrounds. Look at the urban battlegrounds that we've fought on during the last few years. Every one of them was a political symbol. Hue, Manila, or Seoul in 1950. Why? First, we had an imperfect view of the nature of war. Second, the city became this lure, this magnet, if you will, that drew armies into it. Read *The Jewish War* by Flavius Josephus. It was written about 96 A.D. It is about the destruction of the second temple. If you read Josephus and read accounts of fighting in Chechnya, Stalingrad, Manila, or Seoul, you'll see many of the same psychological imperatives and political drives that caused enormous mistakes to be made. The truth is, in most major wars; cities are bypassed unless they are political centers or ideological lures.

Future enemies are unlikely to retreat into urban terrain. If an army retreats into urban terrain, he generally violates his own intent. The army gives up flexibility and the initiative. Don't let this enthusiasm to kick in doors and blow up buildings deflect us from the fact that urban terrain is terrain. When we prepare for war, we need to look at war first from the strategic perspective. What are our ends, ways, and means? Secondly, the operational aspect: What are the means we will employ to achieve our strategic objectives? And finally, what are the tactics we will need to employ in order to achieve those ends?

How many of you have read Liddel Hart's book on the indirect approach? He outlines an absolute immutable tenet of maneuver warfare: Always approach your objectives using the least predictable route. Yet suddenly, when we think about urban warfare, the whole idea of applying the indirect approach as a means of winning with minimal cost is somehow forgotten. During our war game, those who played the media and our political leaders continually asked: "What's taking so long? Why don't you reduce the cities?" That sort of created this feeding frenzy to get troops into the city and end it quickly. It appeared to me as curious that we're a country that seeks to win with minimum cost, not to win quickly, and yet here we were, whipping ourselves up to a froth to get it over with and expending casualties to save time. That's not the American way of war. We were taking the direct rather than the indirect approach. We were trying to destroy the city block by block, street by street, in order to save it.

Here's the point I'm trying to emphasize. How do we fight an enemy force by intruding into his territory? Back to my earlier statement: we treat it as a strategic, not a tactical problem. The first thing we seek to do is to place a force on the ground, in the open if we can, interpose our forces between the enemy and his operational objectives. This is the essence of maneuver warfare and the indirect approach. Since we live in a technological environment where the defensive is the stronger form of warfare, then our object is to exploit our strategic mobility, perhaps even our operational mobility, to place ourselves into a position to induce the enemy to come to us where we can exploit the full capacity of our fire power from defensive positions. It's what Longstreet tried to do at Gettysburg. It's what Lee sought to do at Chancellorsville. The tenets of war don't change.

If open warfare doesn't succeed, then we should seek a strategic *coup de main*. This is the case particularly if the aggressor is occupying the city of an ally—the Kuwaitis in Kuwait City, for example. We should attempt a sharp, quick, psychologically debilitating attempt to capture the center of gravity in that city and collapse it very quickly. In most instances the odds of that occurring successfully are low, however. I can't think of a successful effort in the last 50 or 60 years. We tried a *coup de main* in the AAN War Game. It almost worked. Unfortunately, the enemy had been in the city too long and managed to tactically set himself.

Up until this point, our objective was to win quickly. Time was our enemy. But once the enemy sets himself in the city, the time equation reverses itself. The urban defender, without the initiative, loses this time advantage and the attacker, external to the city, now has time on his side. Of course the time advantage is contingent on a couple of issues. Number one, before we go into a city we must be certain that we have control of the countryside. Most large urban areas cannot survive for very long without sustenance from the surrounding area. This is particularly true in many parts of the emerging world. The second issue is psychological. The nation has to understand why the pace of conflict slowed. A quick urban victory costs lives, while a methodical approach permits victory with fewer casualties.

So the enemy's retreated into the cities, and we now occupy the countryside. What do we do then? In many cities in the emerging world, the provision of basic services is tenuous even in the best of times. Therefore, the most assailable part of these urban areas is probably centered around their vulnerable infrastructures. Densely packed urban masses are easily manipulated by an information warfare campaign. We must maintain psychological dominance over the city so that all the information the citizens are getting about the situation is coming from us, not the enemy. Then we should cause just enough destruction to systematically take the city down by surgically taking out those installations that keep the city functioning, thus allowing the city to gradually collapse on itself. A sort of martial jujitsu, if you will.

What's the center of gravity of a city? The center of gravity is the population! We must find a way to control the population, and we've got to do it without butchering them. If we control the surrounding area, then we should be able to build a sanctuary. Creating a series of suburban safe areas into which the citizens can retreat leaves only the ruling elite and the army inside the city. Remember, what's another characteristic of large cities in these transitional states? Not only are they hanging by tenterhooks with regard to their being able to provide basic services, but they also contain all of the essential elements of government: cultural, political, economic, military, and bureaucratic, which often is the ruling elite. So we already have an urban tinderbox juxtaposed next to the urban poor ripe to be exploited. Control the enemy's information, find the spots in which the enemy is vulnerable, and then create sanctuaries.

Now, in order to defeat an urban enemy, even if time is on our side, we have to gain control of the urban mass. How do we do that? Well we do it like we did it in Vietnam, many times successfully: through the use of a cordon operation. A cordon operation is exactly what the name implies. It is a loose way to control the activities of the city from outside the immediate confines of the dense urban mass. We have the technology at our command, thanks to the information age, that allows us to do that today if we choose to. Control the city from outside; establish a loose cordon; take your time; find the vulnerable points; and destroy them systematically in a discreet, surgical form of direct action. The idea of pouring divisions into an urban mass to me is not wise. And the idea of carpet bombing is equally inappro-

priate. Remember that the decisive ingredient in urban warfare is the people. If we empty a city of its population, then all that remains is a militarily irrelevant urban shell.

Once we've established the cordon, and gained control of the urban masses, we've won. The war is over. We own the countryside. The enemy has no initiative. We've contained the enemy in the city. We can only lose by becoming impatient again; we don't want to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It seems to me that those urban takedowns that have been successful in the past—the Siege of Paris in 1870 comes to mind—have been the types of operations in which the army first gains the initiative; second, controls the countryside; third, contains the urban environment; fourth, reverses the relative advantage of time; and finally, allows the city to collapse on itself.

Remember, war is a test of will, not a test of material supremacy. An enemy is beaten when he knows he's beaten. The urban environment fundamentally is no different from any other military environment. We must protect the enemy's people and break the will of the army to resist. Once we've done that, victory is ours.

Questions and Answers with MG Scales

Major Sumner: The clock is often ticking before forces are committed to an operation. How would you overcome this time-over-mission type mentality?

General Scales: Excellent question. First, pick your wars carefully. Secondly, when we chose to go to war, make sure we understand what our center of gravity is. And our center of gravity is what? Will. Generally, it is defined by our tolerance for casualties. As an aside, I think we may at times overstate our aversion to casualties, frankly. Before the Gulf War, one of the things that struck me was the speculation that if Saddam Hussein used weapons of mass destruction, we would be suffering casualties of somewhere around 30,000. Not all dead, but casualties of around 30,000. America gasped, but we didn't stop the deployment. Nonetheless, our potential enemies view our weakness as will, as defined by our tolerance for casualties. So the answer is, we can have it slow, methodical with a low expenditure of casualties, or we can roar up the middle with lots of casualties.

Audience member: Would you say, then, that all this talk we've heard earlier today about operational objectives is incorrect? Are operational objectives immaterial?

General Scales: No sir. Operational objectives are important, but they are not necessarily strategic objectives. I can't think of an example in at least the last 100 years where a strategic objective could be defined as a single piece of urban terrain.

Audience member: Vicksburg?

General Scales: Okay, let's take a look at the real significance of Vicksburg. Fourth of July 1863. Lee is crushed. Twenty-four thousand casualties at Gettysburg. Pemberton surrenders to Grant. Forty thousand Confederate prisoners. By the fifth of July, was the South defeated? No, in fact the strategic center of gravity in the Civil War was the will of the Confederate nation to resist, not the ability to win or lose battles, or cities like Vicksburg for that matter. One could even argue that Vicksburg, since so little of the Southern sustenance came from west of the Mississippi, was not terribly relevant. Very little of what was needed to sustain the South came from west of the Mississippi.

Audience member: You talked about the center of gravity and that once all the conditions are met in the waiting game, time's on your side. Could you identify maybe a laundry list of tactical centers of gravity?

General Scales: Excellent question. No, let me stick to what I've said. The vulnerable part of a large urban mass is the civilian population. As a general rule, he who controls the civilian population will prevail. In taking down a city, our first object should be to surgically take out the ruling elite, if possible. That, however, is probably not possible, as we've seen in recent history. Absent that, then we need to take out those points within the city that will cause the urban mass to move out. What would that be? I'm not sure, but I could give you some examples. Certainly, I think communications could be first. Drop the communications and then establish our own surrogate communications network. Next? Probably those things that sustain life over time. Someone mentioned water. I'd say water is probably about right, electricity, and so forth. But in order to do that, and to do it in as humanitarian a way as we can, we need to give them an

alternative way to survive. We need to have a sanctuary of some sort. Now, someone says, that's too much to ask for an army, to both provide succor for the enemy and then to defeat him. Not necessarily. We did it in Iraq fairly successfully. We leverage our occupation of the countryside to provide the sustenance for the civilian urban population as it seeks sanctuary. There is no urban mass that is economically viable or totally sustainable on its own. The city must get its sustenance from some external source. Power, water, and food. Well, we now control those, so we establish an alternative living environment outside the city to draw the civilian population out. If the enemy lets his population go, then he can no longer hide behind them. If the enemy keeps them contained inside the city, then he becomes the bad guy in the eyes of his own people because he can no longer sustain them. I'm giving you a very simplistic solution. Obviously war has too many variables, and it's far too complex to allow this model to be that clean, but the alternative is to go through this street-clearing operation and lose a lot of lives in the process. Be careful when your object drives you to immediately go to the tactical.

Audience member: To me, your solutions don't address the challenges that we actually face. We had to establish order in Haiti and in Mogadishu. Those are the challenges, I think.

General Scales: You are correct, but that's a different challenge. I mean, the area I'm discussing involves combat decisions. Haiti is obviously something entirely different. That's a humanitarian operation. But I believe that the principles of offering sustainment and sustenance to the local population are about the same. I'm talking about a city that's occupied by an army no longer able to sustain itself in the field. That army uses the city as a means of preserving itself long enough for us to tire of the war first. If you want to offer an alternative view, sure. I mean, Mogadishu's a good case in point; Bangladesh after the floods in 1991 would be another example. Different situation. One of the great wonders of the American military system is our ability to cover the full spectrum of operations. That's the subject of another discussion.

Audience member: General, I know you like a good argument. Let's say that we didn't stop the war after 100 hours. Say that we've got forces outside of Basra and Saddam Hussein is slaughtering his own population. Alternatively, what if Milosevic puts Albanians in

selected urban areas in Kosovo and starts slaughtering them? We can't politically afford to stand there and let time take care of things. The enemy leader is not going to let the population leave the city. In these particular cases it appears we have a strategic, operational, and tactical necessity to go in.

General Scales: Give the National Command Authorities the option to make those decisions, but we have to be realistic. The Basra solution: Saddam Hussein goes in and starts executing his own citizens. But let me offer an alternative. Unless the enemy is a complete strategic incompetent, he is fighting a war to win it, or at least to avoid losing it. So he has his own strategic objectives. If his reaction is simply to line up people in front of CNN cameras and execute them en masse, he loses the support and good will of the rest of the world. That doesn't make a lot of strategic sense.

Audience member: What about what occurred in cities in northern Iraq?

General Scales: Again, give the National Command Authorities a realistic assessment of what's involved here. Let me give you a better example. Last spring we did a war game at the Army War College where a large Middle Eastern oil-producing state was invaded by another central Asian state. The invader went immediately into the cities. They didn't even stop to fight in the open but went immediately into the cities and started executing the extended royal family. The enemy used that as a means of inducing us to attack. And we did attack. And of course we got waxed. We suffered thousands of casualties in the game. To my mind, if we still view our center of gravity as being able to win at minimum cost in a reasonable time, then the National Command Authorities would be very reluctant to take that bait. But I'd also argue that the aggressor would be reluctant to offer it, because remember in this CNN world of ours, the enemy is also playing to world opinion as well.

Audience member: Let's go from the hypothetical to the actual. You've mentioned Tet and Hue. If we had tried the indirect approach and cordon and allowed the locals to come on out, I don't know how effective that would have been, given that the North Vietnamese slaughtered some 4,000 of the citizenry that were friendly to the South. They probably would not have let the locals come out.

Our enemies have a better track record of controlling the media than we do and even if they shut down the media for a while, they still have an advantage with the media that we sometimes don't enjoy.

General Scales: I'm not so sure that's true. I would argue that if we take information warfare as seriously as we do today, and we continue to exploit our advantage in that regard, and if our motives are as selfless as they have been in previous wars, I don't think that the information war will be lost. I think that Hue in 1968 was a terrible shock to the American people. And it wasn't just Hue. The whole country was in flames. And so the pressure was, as I recall, to take the enemy down everywhere as quickly as we could and expel him from several cities, to include Saigon. Did the extreme sacrifice of those Marines allow fewer South Vietnamese to die during that period of time? The answer may never be known.

Audience member: If someone is less optimistic about the relative advantage of time, is there an intermediate approach value besides the indirect approach?

General Scales: That's a great question. Let me answer it in a roundabout way. It seems to me that the Army is essentially a doctrine-based and doctrine-driven institution. We tend to do what we have either practiced or studied in the past. How long did it take the Civil War armies to adopt open order and the automatic use of field fortifications to offset the dominance of the muzzle-loading rifle? Four years, 600,000 dead. And that's because neither Army had time to think through what the impact of the extension of the killing zone might be. I would contend that the same rule applies in urban warfare. If we don't adapt our doctrine and change our culture to fit the circumstances, the soldiers, at least initially, are going to do what they've been taught to do at MOUT sites. Is there a middle ground? Perhaps so. But maybe we ought to say in our doctrine that in urban warfare, in most cases when fighting in cities, the time equation reverses. It's time to rethink maneuver warfare in a slightly different context. The next time we come up against the Citadel in Hue maybe we will take a moment and think about it.

Is there a middle ground for time, to get back to the original question? I don't know. I'll just tell you this: As a rule, armies that have been the most successful in urban warfare have been those who have

not rushed the walls. They've been those who have been methodical about how they approach the city. Somewhere in our doctrine we have to be able to say that cities are different from open terrain. The principles of war still apply. Use the indirect approach. But the indirect approach in this case is not determined so much by availability of axes of advance at vulnerable points, but by the advantage of time.

Audience member: We're in the business of trying to figure out which toys are appropriate and affordable in conjunction with urban operations. I can't help but think that the concept of surrounding the enemy and taking him down indirectly seems to have application in the Kosovo situation right now. Milosevic is surrounded. He has perhaps one ally who's probably not going to come to his aid (Russia). He faces not an ad hoc coalition, but a real alliance, and what we seem to be doing is trying to make the cordon with an air campaign. There is the clarion call to make something happen on the ground.

General Scales: I'm having a tough time disagreeing with you. What's the hurry? My point exactly. It doesn't matter how we apply the pressure. Apply it from the air; apply from the ground; apply it from both. What's the hurry? Where's he going to go?

Audience member: I'm not sure I agree. We are painting ourselves into a box in Kosovo. We said we were never going to employ ground troops. We keep hearing about CNN diplomacy forcing us to do something. Look at all the refugees.

General Scales: What I say in my article is that the secret to success in future war is balance. I've got a new article coming out, in fact, and it's a companion piece to the "Adaptive Enemies" article. It's called "A Sword with Two Edges." In that article, I argue for the creation of a balanced military that has the ability to maneuver with the same precision in the future that we can strike with today. Let's say that the enemy adapts his doctrinal method of war to fight an attrition-centered style of war—ours. We can adapt, too, right? The gentleman I spoke to, a wonderful guy, retired Lieutenant General Lee from this large Asian nation I visited, used only one English term the whole time we talked. He used the phrase "non-nodal army." Interesting, isn't it? He said to me: "General, the information age is

neutral. Mao was right; you were wrong.” He noted that as we become more proficient at sensing, seeing, and striking targets with great precision through the use of the information age, his army will become better at his own style of war, which is to control large areas of territory with ever more discreet bits of combat forces (non-nodal armies) while still retaining the ability to mass on demand. We may have the advantage of satellite technology, but he has the advantage of cellular technology. It works to our advantage, just as much as yours does for you.

I found this gentleman to be relatively profound. If he’s right, how do we develop a military force in the future that’s able to take on an adaptive enemy who arrays himself to survive precision strikes? The answer for me is to build a military that’s capable of precision maneuver. Our forces have to develop an operational doctrine or method of war that allows us to command territory over a broad expanse and yet still remain cohesive. To interpose our forces in ever more finite and discrete bits, to interpose ourselves between the enemy’s forces, to break down his command and control, to prevent him from massing on demand, which is his center of gravity. Then we will seek to force the enemy to come to us, again presuming that the defensive is the superior form of warfare. If we do that, then this adaptive enemy I’ve just described to you is left with two unacceptable alternatives. Number one, he can stay in place and wither and die. Number two, he can come out of his holes and attack us, at which time the advantage is ours. Either way, he loses.

If you’re developing a doctrine for a style of war that’s already passed, you’re simply making yesterday perfect. If we meet an adaptive enemy who’s able to think a generation—or half a generation—ahead of you, then we’re building a future force that’s going down the wrong path. If we can’t approach warfare with a balance of ability to gain positional advantage as well as to kill, then we are developing a military force that’s in great danger of being defeated. We saw it in Korea; we saw it in Vietnam. How many more times do we have to repeat that?

Let me end with a quote. I wrote about this when I talk about the Western Front in World War I and how difficult it was for us to adapt to the dominance of the defensive. The war cost 11,000,000 dead before the generals could figure out how to do restore balance to the

battlefield. Winston Churchill wrote, "Battles are won by slaughter and maneuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter." Balance, balance, balance is the key to future warfare. We may fight a major competitor in the future who not only has the ability to fight, to use a doctrine of area control, but also to apply his own form of precision and counterprecision. If we don't take him on with a force capable of both strike and maneuver, we run a real risk of slaughter and defeat. The danger is extreme.

Listen, I've enjoyed talking to you this afternoon. It was fun. Great conference and I appreciate the opportunity. Thanks.